

The Ballarat Naturalist

MAY 2012



The Mallard x Pacific Black Duck Hybridisation Threat

Our April talk was presented by Patrick Guay, a research fellow from Victoria University, on the topic of how hybridisation with domestic ducks is threatening Pacific Black Ducks in Australia. Patrick's area of expertise is in waterfowl ecology and conservation & population genetics and he is well known to our group through his work on the swans and musk ducks on Lake Wendouree.

Overall we don't have a good track record when it comes to protecting birds. Most of us know about the effect of removal and fragmentation of habitat, particularly on our woodland birds, but have you thought about what happens if some of our common species like ducks start to disappear?

If you think about most places we visit where there is water; streams, reservoirs, lakes and swamps we will generally see Pacific Black Ducks. They are one of our most widely spread and abundant ducks.

Patrick began by showing us two specimens, a pure Pacific Black Duck, and a hybrid, which was a paler brown and had less distinctive markings. The Victorian Field Naturalists provided funds for the specimen to undergo taxidermy so Patrick had good examples to use at talks and displays.

Patrick then outlined many examples of hybridisation such as dingo x dogs, domestic cats x wild cats, rainbow x apache trout in America, ruddy duck and whiteduck in Europe, *Grevillea rosmarinifolia* x indigenous grevilleas and Sydney Golden Wattle (*Acacia longifolia* [subsp. longifolia](#)) and coastal wattle (*Acacia longifolia* [subsp. sophorae](#)).

The Pacific Black Duck, *Anas superciliosa* is closely related to the Mallard, *A. platyrhynchos*, which was introduced into Australia from the

Northern Hemisphere in the late 1800s. The two species have similar food and habitat needs. Throughout the world Mallards hybridise with many native duck species and the potential threat to local duck populations is well recognised. When these two species interbreed the Mallard strain is dominant and in successive generations the characteristics of our native Pacific Black Duck may be lost.

The Mallard are more sedentary birds and the Pacific Black Duck hybrids may not be as able to survive in the long term as pure native duck species are nomadic especially in times of drought.

Hybrids of waterfowl are common, many occur in the wild, and many are fertile. If the situation resulted in sterility as in the case of mules which are crosses between horses and donkeys then there would be fewer problems.

Mallard are the main culprit in hybridization and there are recorded crosses between Mallards and 40 other species of ducks in the wild, a further 20 in captivity, and 17 of these are fertile wild crosses.

In Australia wild Mallards are rare, only being found around the SE and SW coast, we mainly have the domestic duck which is a descendant of the Mallard. People seem to have an urge to set their unwanted ducks free on local ponds and lakes. These urban ponds are now acting as a Mallard gene pool reservoir.

Mallards are able to out-compete male Pacific Black Ducks because they are dominant and don't rely on courtship behaviour. The male Mallard forces itself on female Pacific Black Ducks. The Mallards also breed earlier in the season than Pacific Black Ducks. Mallards breed with other Mallards first and, as there are an excess of Mallards, they then breed with Pacific Black Ducks.

In New Zealand their pure Black Duck has disappeared through hybridization after the Mallard was introduced in the mid 1800s. The first hybrid appeared in 1917 and by 1980 there were less than 5% of the black ducks left. There is a similar story in Lord Howe Island after the Mallard self-introduced.

Currently there are no management strategies to deal with hybrids and this is partly to do with legislation. In Victoria a species that is kept as a domestic animal cannot be named as a noxious species. Wild varieties of Mallards are declared noxious but when it comes to the hybrids local council and DSE don't seem to want to get involved apart from an occasional discrete cull. There is the burden of proof as to who owns the duck

and so it is difficult to organise a coordinated removal of hybrids from an area.

If we still want to have our Pacific Black Ducks then we need to take action. There was lively discussion and some interesting ideas on what form of action is required. Probably the first step is to raise awareness as Patrick so ably does.

We need to educate others on what is at stake. Perhaps we should begin by having discussions locally with the City of Ballarat to see if they will erect some signage around Lake Wendouree and the dams in Victoria Park to advise people against dumping their ducks. Releasing these ducks should be made more difficult.

Anyone have a good recipe for duck pâté?

Elspeth Swan

Excursion to Lakes and Wetlands west of Ballarat

Sunday 15th April 2012

Twelve members gathered at the caravan park boat ramp at Lake Burrumbeet to start the April excursion. With very little flowering as is typical of this time of year the excursion focussed on looking for birds. Michael and Joyce who had travelled directly to the site reported seeing a magpie with a mouse before the rest of the group arrived. Little black and little pied cormorants could be seen occupying the top of posts as well as in the water and air. Groups of pelicans were just discernable in the distance. At the meeting Wayne reported seeing a white bellied sea eagle at this location but it wasn't there when we looked. Members initially walked west alongside the lake and then travelled to the racecourse point, adding a few birds along the way. Before leaving Lake Burrumbeet a stop was made to view the wet area on the racecourse. This increased considerably the

number of species but the most interesting observations were black shouldered kites and a large nest high up in a tree that included a considerable amount of plastic insulated wire and a piece of plastic mesh as well as normal nesting material. It was then off to Modesty Lane to overlook a large



Photo Goat moth case in ground at Lake Burrumbeet

area that had been wet but the only bird sighting was a whistling kite so it was on through Brewster to Beaufort Lake for lunch. A pleasant area for lunch, but the only bird I observed was a purple swamphen. After lunch it was off to Lake Goldsmith.



The conversation in the car was along the lines of “If brolgas are seen we will stop.” but it was only after identifying a shady spot and actually stopping that brolgas were sighted. There was one pair feeding on the east

Photo Observing Brolgas

side of the lake and they provided excellent viewing through binoculars. We were off to travel around the south side on the gravel road stopping a few times and, as well as a few species of birds, observed that duck hunters were out in a boat. The most interesting sighting here was the large number of swans. A count of one group totally 90 and when this was extrapolated to the other flocks it was decided there were thousands of swans.

A final stop was made for afternoon tea before heading back to Ballarat along the Carnham-Lake Goldsmith road and here the only flower noted for the day was observed which John identified as a Woolly New Holland Daisy *Vittadinia gracilis*. In total, 37 bird species were observed. It was lovely to see water back in the lakes and enjoy an interesting drive through the local area. Thanks to John for leading the group.

Peter Dalman

Bird list for Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat excursion 15 April 2012

John Gregurke

	Burrumbeet	Goldsmith	Other
Black Swan	Burrumbeet	Goldsmith	
Australian Shelduck	Burrumbeet	Goldsmith	
Pacific Black Duck	Burrumbeet		
Grey Teal	Burrumbeet		

Bird list continued

	Burrumbeet	Goldsmith	Other
Australian Wood Duck			Travelling
Australasian Grebe	Burrumbeet		
Little Pied Cormorant	Burrumbeet		
Little Black Cormorant	Burrumbeet		
Australian Pelican	Burrumbeet		
White-faced Heron	Burrumbeet	Goldsmith	
Black-shouldered Kite	Burrumbeet		
Whistling Kite			Modesty Lane
Nankeen Kestrel	Burrumbeet		
Brown Falcon			Travelling
Brolga		Goldsmith	
Purple Swamphen			Beaufort
Eurasian Coot		Goldsmith	
Masked Lapwing	Burrumbeet	Goldsmith	
Silver Gull	Burrumbeet	Goldsmith	
Galah	Burrumbeet		
Laughing Kookaburra			Travelling
Superb Fairy-wren	Burrumbeet		
Striated Thornbill	Burrumbeet		
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Burrumbeet		
White-eared Honeyeater		Goldsmith	
White-plumed Honey-eater	Burrumbeet		
New Holland Honeyeater	Burrumbeet		
Grey Shrike-thrush	Burrumbeet		
Magpie-lark	Burrumbeet	Goldsmith	
Grey Fantail	Burrumbeet		
Willy Wagtail	Burrumbeet		
Australian Magpie	Burrumbeet		
Little Raven	Burrumbeet	Goldsmith	
Australasian Pipit			Travelling
House Sparrow	Burrumbeet		
Welcome Swallow	Burrumbeet		
Common Blackbird			Travelling

Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat Incorporated

No. A0014919P

ABN 13 150 403 135

Minutes of the Meeting held at the Primary Industries Training Centre

Friday 13 April 2012

1. Opening and Apologies

The President, Peter Dalman, welcomed 24 members & visitors. He paid a tribute to Greg Binns who died on 13 March 2012 and read a card received from Genny Binns.

Apologies were received from Carol Hall, Genny Binns, Alison Pilmore, Dulcie Brooke, Margaret Martin, Mike Sorrell, Elizabeth and Denis Thurgood, John Morrish, Alison and John Williams. *Accepted on the motion of Paul Norquay; seconded John Mildren. Carried.*

2. Minutes of previous meeting: Tabled and Summarised in Ballarat Naturalist. *Confirmed on the motion of Nina Netherway, Seconded Fran Hanrahan. Carried.*

3. Correspondence

IN:

- Castlemaine Naturalist April 2012
- Geelong Naturalist April 2012
- Whirrakee April 2012
- Environment Victoria – Affiliation Renewal & Green Action News
- Corangamite Landcare Grants – Guidelines
- 2 x subs for treasurer
- Australian Tax Office – proposed changes for charities – change of details form may need to be filled in as our Public Officer is being changed. (Committee to discuss)
- Email from Miriam Straub requesting April meeting details – they have just moved to Ballarat and are interested in joining.

OUT:

- Change of Public Officer form to Consumer Affairs and letter requesting a new annual incorporation form to be sent to C.Hall at her address.
- Syllabus 2012-13 emailed to members.

- Syllabus emailed to Miriam Straub with explanation of April meeting changes.

4. Business arising from correspondence

That affiliation with Environment Victoria be renewed. *Moved Elspeth Swan, Seconded Bill Murphy. Carried.*

5. Reports

Treasurer's Report: Opening Balance \$5076.16, Income: \$646, Expenses:\$137.70 Closing Balance: \$5574.46. *Accepted on the motion of Les Hanrahan; Seconded Fran Hanrahan; Carried.*

6. General Business

- The appointments of Fran Hanrahan as Vice-President and Carol Hall as Public Officer were confirmed on the motion of Bill Murphy; seconded Peter Billing.
- Elspeth Swan and John Mildren were elected to vacant committee positions following nomination by Nina Netherway; seconded Jacki Metcalf.
- Club camp at Star of Sea Convent Apollo Bay: Twelve members expressed interest in attending at a cost of \$40 per person per night. Fran will book the venue for an available weekend in September or August.
- Peter thanked Carol and Nina for arranging printing of 2012-2013 Syllabus Card. Copies available to members. Note the reminder about checking with committee re excursion details if you don't attend the preceding Friday meeting.
- Fran Hanrahan will edit the next issue of *Ballarat Naturalist*.
- The setting up of a foot hygiene kit to prevent the spread of cinnamon fungus during excursion was referred to the committee.
- Arbor Day planting to be held in Victoria Park on Wednesday 23 May. Fran Hanrahan will notify City of Ballarat that a group from Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat will attend.

7. Field Reports

- Carol Hall: Early April a Little Eagle perched on dead overhanging branches in Fairyland. Further discussion with Ed Dunen a few days later revealed he had photos of the Little Eagle feasting on a coot on the Fairyland footpath. Great Crested Grebe in Fairyland sitting for far too long, eggs presumably not viable – incubation period is ~ 26 days.

Immediately after filing this report the nest had been vacated.

- John Gregurke: Pink and white forms of Common Heath flowering in Canadian Forest on 10 April. One flower seen on Cranberry Heath.
- Wayne McGuire: At Lake Burrumbeet an immature White-breasted Sea-Eagle and Black Falcon.
- Paul Norquay: Two Tawny Frogmouths perched on post at Mt Egerton.
- Peter Billing: White Ibis at Nerrina Wetland.
- Gavin Cerini: 4 Brown Quail, 2 Black-shouldered Kite north of Waubra.
- Claire Dalman: Anglers catching large number of trout in Lake Wendouree.
- Elspeth Swan: Phytophthora is killing grass trees in Canadian Forest and Pryor Park.

8. Excursion Arrangements

Sunday 15 April: John Gregurke, Peter and Claire Dalman will lead excursion to *Western Wetlands* including Lake Burrumbeet, Beaufort Lake and Lake Goldsmith.

9. Syllabus Item

Patrick Guay – *The Black Duck-Mallard Hybridisation Threat*. Peter Dalman thanked Patrick for his clearly presented threats of introduced species which can threaten the survival of native species by interbreeding.

10. Supper

Future SEANA camps

Spring 2012	Bendigo FNC, 17-20 August
Autumn 2013	Peninsula FNC at Point Nepean
Spring 2013	Broken Creek FNC in Murray Valley
Autumn 2014	Upper Goulburn FNC Marysville (unconfirmed)
Spring 2014	Portland FNC

FNCB 2012 Camp - Star of the Sea, Apollo Bay

14 beds have been booked for the weekend of July 13-16.

Cost is \$40 per adult, secondary school students, \$15 and younger chil-

Camperdown SEANA camp report

by Val Hocking

Recently around 110 people gathered at Camperdown to intensively learn about the volcanic plains of the Western district. We divided into 4 groups. Some visited Mortlake quarry and broke up volcanic bombs in search of olivine crystals. Others climbed Mt Elephant and visited private wetland areas.



Photo of Lake Gnotuk, Camperdown, looking towards Mt Noorat

I toured around Camperdown, first seeing the scenic lakes, Bullen Merri and Gnotuk. Originally these areas were Maar volcanoes which formed when hot magma rising to the surface, came in contact with groundwater contained in the sedimentary rock. The magma super-heated the groundwater, creating a huge explosion that excavated the crater and blasted the magma and surrounding rocks into clouds of fine ash. The fine ash (tuff) fell in layers around the crater rim. The base of the Maar then later became a lake. Interestingly, although these lakes are very close together, one is very saline and the other is only slightly brackish.

Next we climbed up Mt Leura and looked towards Mt Sugarloaf, both of which are nested maar type volcanoes. Further volcanic activity within the original crater (2.5km x 1.7km) resulted in over 20 scoria cones being formed, with the two mountains being the biggest.

On Sunday my group drove through the Stony Rises, which were formed from fingers of lava flowing from nearby Mt Pornden and on to the huge Lake Corangamite. We climbed to the top of Red Rock, also a nested maar with multiple craters.



The night meetings following dinner, included talks on frogs, reptiles of the area including the endangered Corangamite water skink, and the volcanoes of the Western District.

Once again a great camp, organised by the small group from Timboon.

Photo: Mt Sugarloaf from Mt Leura



ANN Campout 2012

Canberra 13-21 October

SEANA Autumn Meeting

The South East Australian Naturalists' Association autumn meeting was held during the recent camp at Camperdown.

Denis Thurgood (Ballarat FNC) and Dick Southcombe (Geelong FNC) were re-elected to the SEANA committee and joined by Paul Hockett (Broken Creek FNC) and Russell Green (FNC Victoria). Paul Hockett has accepted the position as archivist. The office bearers were re-elected: President: Helen Langley; Vice President: Noel Schleiger; Secretary; Phil Rayment; Treasurer: Denis Thurgood.

Western Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association began in 1960. Bendigo FNC requested that mementos and photographs of the past 50 plus years be brought to the Spring Camp for display and then passed on to the archivist.

Access to newsletters of clubs has been discussed in the past and it is suggested that individual clubs post these on their own websites (after deleting sensitive personal information) and notify the SEANA secretary of the web address. Photographs of people and places would be welcome and should be labelled.

Prominent Naturalists is a section on the SEANA website <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~seana/> A request was made to clubs for articles about living naturalists to be submitted. Information about the valuable contribution Greg Binns made to Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat, WVFNCA and natural history in general has been forwarded to the webmaster and now is posted on the website. Are there other naturalists among our members who should also be recognised?

SEANA has accumulated over \$50,000 which is available for grants to clubs for a variety of projects. Loans have been made to several clubs for printing books but few grants have been made in recent years. During discussion a wide variety of ways to spend the money were made. These

included land purchase, on ground conservation works, scholarships, archival records, help to clubs experiencing financial difficulty and promotion of field naturalist clubs. The SEANA committee will consider the issue and bring back information to the spring meeting.

SEANA camps are now planned well ahead. Clubs from around the state have offered to host future camps. (See list on page 8.)

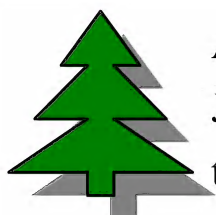
Save Our Precious Wildlife Habitats!

Extract from a joint statement on Victorian Native Vegetation Rules

Many community-based groups are deeply concerned about the State Government's proposed review of the Native Vegetation Management Framework. The following is part of the joint statement.

We request that any review of the Native Vegetation Management Framework should:

1. Be undertaken in an open and transparent manner and involve extensive consultation with all sections of the community, including conservation and Landcare groups.
2. Be informed by the best available ecological science and policy approaches, including an assessment of the economic value of vegetation and the services it provides, not just the apparent regulatory cost.
3. Aim to improve the key elements of the existing framework, including net gain, the three-step approach (especially "avoid"), like for like for offsets, and robust assessment methods that must be underpinned by strengthened monitoring and research to support adaptive management towards net gain.
4. Improve monitoring, transparency and accounting of vegetation offsets.
5. Include no further exemptions for clearing.
6. Contain stronger incentives and education for landholders.
7. Be informed by an overarching state policy for the recovery of the health of our natural environment.



Arbour Day tree-planting in Victoria Park, Sturt St

Join a few FNC members at 11am Wed. 23 May, 2012

to help plant some trees in Plane Avenue, Victoria Park.

CALENDAR 2012

MAY

- Fri 4 *Waterfalls of Victoria* Ian Wacey, *Author*
- Sun 6 *Wombat Forest Excursion* - meet at Spargo Creek Hotel at 10.15am.
Leaders - Murray Ralph and Gayle Osbourne.
- Tues 24 Committee meeting at Carol's, 5 Elizabeth St., Wendouree

JUNE

- Fri 1 *Fungi* Geoff Lay Field Naturalist .
- **Sat 2** *Fungi* Venue to be announced Geoff Lay

Subscriptions are now due

Should you wish to pay your membership at a bank or online,
our bank details are Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat Inc.
Bendigo Bank BSB 633 108, Account no. 1191 12290.



Please remember to add your name.

Ordinary member	\$35	Family	\$55
Distant member	\$15	Student	\$15
Newsletter postage (Ordinary member)		\$7	



Committee

President..... Peter Dalman
Vice –President Fran Hanrahan
Secretary Carol Hall
Treasurer..... Les Hanrahan

Claire Dalman
.John Gregurke
Elspeth Swan

Val Hocking
John Mildren

Correspondence: PO Box 328W, Ballarat West, 3350

Email: Secretary:- Carol Hall,
Editors: Nina Netherway,
Fran Hanrahan

Website: <http://fieldnatballarat.wordpress.com>

Meetings are held at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory Sts,
on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm..

Excursions: Leave from the carpark at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies
and Gregory Sts.

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